

## **PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE GREEN SHACK, 2504 EAST FREMONT STREET**

Frank Wright, Curator of Education, Nevada State Museum and Historical Society

According to James McCormick, present owner and proprietor of the Green Shack, Mrs. Mattie Jones (also known as "Jimmie" Jones) came to Las Vegas in 1928 after the death of her husband. In 1929 or 1930, she opened the Colorado restaurant at her two-room home on what was soon to be the Boulder Highway and across from the present location of the Green Shack. The Green Shack offered chicken, biscuits and bootleg whiskey from a window.

Circa 1930-1932, so the story goes, that building was razed and a railroad barracks building formerly owned by the Union Pacific (or perhaps its Land and Water Company) was moved to the present location. That building constitutes the main part of the present dining room. An additional eight feet was added to that section, probably in 1939, and picture windows installed. The portion of the building that houses the present bar and lounge was added to the barracks in 1934. Mr. McCormick has been told that Mattie Jones received Clark County liquor license number 1 after the repeal of prohibition. Few other alterations have been made except for the addition of several small outbuildings. The hard wood floor is still in place though covered, and wall paneling was added about thirty years ago. Stone fireplaces, in each of the building's main sections may not be original, but informants suggest that they were in place in the early 1930s. (Mr. McCormick informs me that even the original skillets used for cooking chicken are still in use.)

Frank McCormick, Jimmie Jones's nephew, came in about 1934 to manage the bar when the sale of liquor was permitted. Jimmie Jones who, with a long-time friend had done most of the cooking, died in 1967 and Frank McCormick died three months later. Frank's wife Elaine managed the business thereafter. Apparently the operation was leased between 1909 and 1985, and since that time Frank and Elaine's son James, and his wife Barbara has operated the establishment.

Informants suggest that during Boulder Dam construction days and ever since the Green Shack has been a favorite of local patrons. Mr. McCormick recalls that many of the community's legal fraternities made it a frequent stop and many legal decisions were concluded there before going to court. The restaurant has also hosted numerous civic and social clubs for their regular meetings over the years.

### **Narrative Description**

The Green Shack, consisting of two parts, is of very simple construction. The front section that was the original building moved to the site about 1932, is of simple, rectangular barracks construction with a gable roof. It is of stuccoed wood frame construction. The original dimensions of this building were about 32' by 22'. During remodeling, probably in 1939, eight-

foot extensions with shed roofs were added to the northeast (front) side and to the northwest. The extensions feature large single-pane windows. The original entrance, which was on the northeast side facing the highway, was removed during the remodeling and the entrance moved to the northwest. Other significant alterations to this portion of the building are the covering of the original open-truss construction with a lowered ceiling, the carpeting of the original hardwood floor, and the addition of a large stone fireplace and brick exterior chimney on the southeast side. About 1960, a wood frame storeroom was added to that side. A semi-circular neon-lighted sign attached to the front gable dates from the early 1940s.

A rectangular wood frame building of similar dimensions (25' by 40') was added circa 1935, but possibly as late as 1939. The gable roof line continues that of the original structure. The exterior siding of this part of the building is clapboard. As befits the name, both parts of the building are painted a bright green. This section, which has served as bar, gambling area and lounge since the 1930s, features a stone fireplace and brick exterior chimney virtually identical to that in the front portion. Interior walls in both parts are wood paneling. Except for carpeting, a lowered ceiling and decorations, the interiors of both portions of the building appear as they did in the 1930s. A canopy that extends over the entrance along the northwest side dates from 1975.

The building, maintained as it has been since its opening by members of one family, has been kept in excellent repair and appealing appearance. The restaurant is separated from part of its parking lot on the northwest side by a very short and little-used street. Application to have the street vacated is underway. The property is also occupied by two disconnected sheds and a small brick building which serves as the owners' home and office.

### **Areas of Significance**

Commerce, Entertainment and Recreation, and Social History.

### **Period of Significance**

1932 -- 1943

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

The Green Shack Restaurant is historically significant because of its association with the rapid growth era of Boulder Dam construction in southern Nevada. It is significant also because, unlike the few other establishments of the time, it provided a comfortable, rural and egalitarian environment that ideally suited it to serve as a social center for dam workers, the city's political and legal elite, young people, various civic and fraternal groups, and the populace at large. It serves as a reminder of the years of the Great Depression when, paradoxically, Las Vegas was growing and optimistic and was yet to experience the great transformation of the tourism and gaming boom that followed World War II. Still operated by members of the family that opened it, it retains the ambiance, perhaps better than any other single Las Vegas building of its kind, of immediate pre-war Las Vegas.

## **Historical Background and Significance**

From its founding in 1905 until about the time that Mrs. Mattie Jones started her restaurant activities in Las Vegas, the city was a very small town centered almost wholly on the railroad that was the cause for its existence. In 1928, Congress passed the Boulder Canyon Project Act that assured the construction of Boulder (Hoover) Dam. While actual construction did not begin until 1931, the area experienced considerable growth in the early years of the Great Depression in anticipation of the opening of construction jobs. The official census for 1930 shows Las Vegas as having a population of just over 5,000.

Mrs. Jones and her husband had been involved in real estate in Taft, California. She came to Las Vegas following the death of her husband in 1928 and purchased a considerable amount of desert property in the Las Vegas area. Probably in 1929 (the exact date is uncertain) she opened the Colorado Restaurant at a location then considered far out of town on what amounted to a dirt trail leading to the Colorado River. From a window in her residence she sold orders of fried chicken and bootleg whiskey. During the years of prohibition, there were many establishments ringing the city that sold illegal whiskey.

Construction on a new highway to the dam site began early in 1931 and the road was opened for traffic by that August. During that period, scores of new establishments along the highway, many of them selling liquor, had stirred controversy in Las Vegas. By late that year or in 1932, Mrs. Jones had relocated her operation a short distance to the west side of the new highway just inside the city limits. For her new restaurant she purchased (from the Union Pacific Railroad, according to family information) a green barracks-style building, and had it hauled to the new site. The building suggested the name, and the Green Shack Restaurant has operated at the same site by members of the same family ever since.

The original barracks constitutes the main part of the present dining room. The northeast and northwest walls were removed and an additional eight feet was added to those two sides of that section in 1939, and large single-pane windows replaced the small barracks windows. Following the repeal of prohibition, the portion of the building that houses the present bar and lounge was built onto the rear of the original building, probably in 1934 when the sale of beer was permitted. The present owner's father, Frank McCormick who was a nephew of Mrs. Jones, was asked to operate the bar. According to family lore, Mrs. Jones received Clark County liquor license number 1 after the repeal of prohibition.

Few other alterations have been made except for the addition of a storeroom to the southeast side in 1960 and small, disconnected outbuildings. The original hard wood floor is still in place, though carpeted, in the main dining room, and wall paneling was added about thirty years ago. Stone fireplaces, one in each of the building's main sections, are not original, but a newspaper reports that at least one of them was added during remodeling in 1939. Since the interior stonework and the exterior brickwork of the chimneys on the barracks and bar addition are similar, these almost certainly date from the same year.

Mrs. Jones who, with a long-time friend had done most of the cooking, died in 1967 and Frank McCormick died three months later. Frank's wife Elaine managed the business thereafter.

Between 1980 and 1985, was sold, reclaimed, leased for a brief period and then closed. Since 1985, James McCormick, son of Frank and Elaine, has operated the establishment with his wife Barbara.

Though quite a few residences and public buildings remain which date from the period of rapid growth associated with Boulder Dam construction, the Green Shack is additionally significant because of its location beside the highway that carried many dam workers to and from their jobs. Indeed, the establishment was a particular favorite of dam workers of the era. While there were a few other restaurants during the 1930s, the comfortable rural atmosphere of the Green Shack, featuring large fireplaces and easy chairs made it unique. There was a hitching post where nearby residents could tie their horses. (The present hitching post is not original.) During the years of population contraction of the late 1930s, the establishment added regular entertainment, dancing and gambling tables in the cocktail lounge section. In a city where easy marriage was a trademark, weddings were a very frequent occurrence at the Green Shack. Western movie star Hoot Gibson, who owned a divorce-oriented dude ranch in Las Vegas was a frequent visitor.

The Green Shack was also a favorite "hangout" for the local political and legal fraternity, including one local lawyer who became a Nevada Supreme Court justice and another who became lieutenant Governor. The present owner, who has lived in a small cabin near at the rear of the restaurant since 1939, recalls that many legal disputes were resolved at the Green Shack before going to court. Other informants recall that was a favorite place for young people to go after school dances, graduation ceremonies, et cetera. Through the years, the restaurant has also hosted meetings of numerous civic and social clubs.

**RESOLUTION**  
**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY**  
**OF LAS VEGAS, NEVADA TO DESIGNATE THE GREEN SHACK**  
**RESTAURANT AS AN HISTORICAL LANDMARK IN THE CITY OF**  
**LAS VEGAS PURSUANT TO ORDINANCE NO. 3557**  
**LAS VEGAS MUNICIPAL CODE**  
**TITLE 19, CHAPTER 53, SECTION 70.**

WHEREAS, the City Council of the City of Las Vegas finds and declares that the spirit and direction of the City of Las Vegas are founded upon and reflected in its historical past; and

WHEREAS, the historic and cultural foundations of the City should be preserved as a living part of its community life and development in order to give a sense of identity and orientation to the people of Las Vegas; and

WHEREAS, the City Council desires to safeguard the heritage of the City of Las Vegas by preserving buildings, structures, places, sites and districts which reflect the elements of its cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history; and

WHEREAS, the City Council desires to strengthen the local economy by promoting tourist interest in buildings, structures, places, sites and districts of cultural and architectural significance; and

WHEREAS, the City Council desires to promote the preservation of historic and architectural resources for the education, welfare and pleasure of the residents of the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Council provided the mechanism to accomplish the above by adopting Ordinance No. 3557 on February 20, 1991 and appointing the City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission on March 6, 1991; and

WHEREAS, the City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission has as one of its duties to identify potential landmarks and to recommend to the City Council the designation of such landmarks pursuant to Ordinance No. 3557; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with Ordinance No. 3557, the City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission has identified the Green Shack Restaurant at 2504 Fremont Street as potential Landmark and has conducted a public hearing regarding same; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has voted to recommend to the City Council that the Green Shack Restaurant be designated as a Landmark because it exemplified or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering or architectural past and is identifiable with persons or events significant in local history.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Las Vegas, Nevada, that:

1. Based upon the recommendation of the Historic Preservation Commission, the City Council finds that the property identified in Paragraph 2 qualified for designation as a Landmark pursuant to Ordinance No. 3557 because it is of exceptional significance, is not unsound, dangerous or defective, and it exemplified or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering or architectural past and is identifiable with persons or events significant in local history.

2. The following property, therefore, is hereby designated as a Landmark:

**GREEN SHACK RESTAURANT**  
**2504 Fremont Street**  
**Las Vegas, Nevada.**

PASSED, APPROVED AND ADOPTED this Eighteenth day of May, 1994.

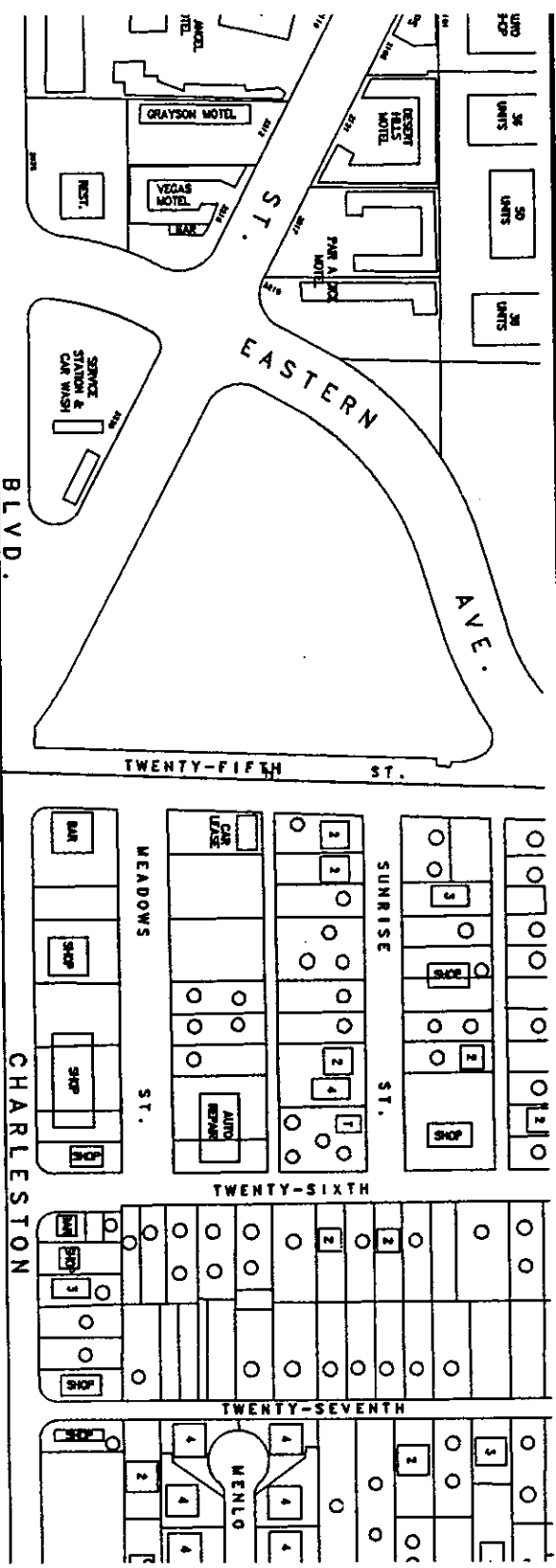
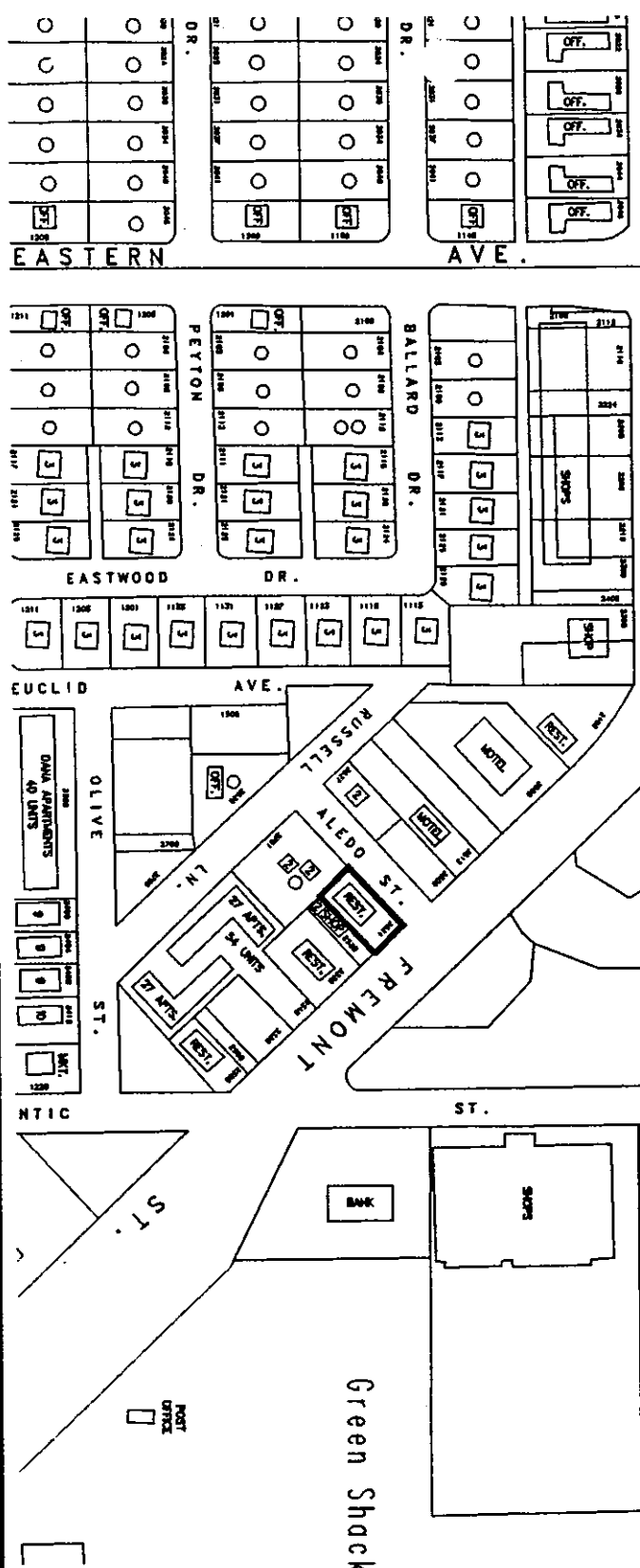
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Jan Lavery Jones, Mayor

ATTEST:

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Kathleen M. Tighe, City Clerk



03 May 1994

Geographic Information System

